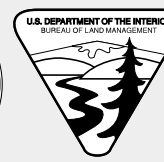


# McGREGOR RANGE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Bureau of Land Management  
Las Cruces Field Office



May 2001

## SCOPING NOTICE

*The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Las Cruces Field Office, is preparing a resource management plan amendment (RMPA) and environmental impact statement (EIS) to address BLM's management of the public land withdrawn for military use within McGregor Range in southern Otero County, New Mexico. The primary reason for the amendment is to develop a new plan for management of the resources on the withdrawn public land within McGregor Range, consistent with current legislation. BLM, the lead*

*Federal agency for the preparation of the RMPA/EIS, will work in concert with U.S. Army, Ft. Bliss, which will participate as a cooperating agency. The BLM has contracted with URS, a qualified consultant, to assist with the preparation of the RMPA/EIS.*

*This notice is beginning the planning process by requesting your comments on the scope of the McGregor Range RMPA/EIS.*

### What are the environmental responsibilities of the BLM and U.S. Army?

Directed by Federal environmental regulations, the BLM and U.S. Army share environmental responsibilities within McGregor Range. As mentioned previously, public land within the Range was withdrawn specifically for military training, a critical part of military operational readiness for national defense. McGregor Range is the nation's principal training facility for air defense systems with combat elements arranged on a simulated battlefield. Training on the range includes limited troop and equipment maneuvers, air defense training and air-to-ground training for multiple-branch active and reserve military units and allied forces. The Army is responsible for using the land wisely, assessing the impacts of its activities on the environment, and minimizing or mitigating those impacts to the extent practicable. In response to those requirements, Ft. Bliss has prepared a number of documents addressing its land use, impacts, and management, most recently including the Ft. Bliss Mission and Master Plan Programmatic EIS and McGregor Range Land Withdrawal Renewal Legislative EIS, completed in 2001, and 1999, respectively. Currently, the Army is preparing an Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP).

Recognizing the land use restrictions necessary to allow military uses, BLM's management actions on this withdrawn public land must be compatible with the military use and consistent with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.

### Why amend the Resource Management Plan?

In 1999, Congress passed the Military Lands Withdrawal Act (Public Law 106-65), which withdrew large tracts of public land for military purposes including approximately 608,000 acres within McGregor Range. The law directed the Secretary of the Interior to manage the withdrawn public land within McGregor Range under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) and to develop a management plan within two years of the law's enactment.

In addition to the legislative requirement to prepare a RMPA for McGregor Range, a new use on the range is in place and resource management guidelines and/or requirements have been developed or updated that were not addressed in the previous RMPA, which was completed in 1990. These new activities have changed the character of the landscape on a portion of McGregor Range and, as a result, BLM must update the 1990 RMPA and modify how it manages the resources on the range.

The EIS studies will identify the potential impacts that implementation of the RMPA could have on the environment and identify appropriate measures to mitigate those impacts. The EIS will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA, PL 106-65, FLPMA, and other associated regulations.

What are the steps in the planning process?

The planning and EIS process, which is scheduled for completion in about 18 months, has nine basic steps including (1) identification of issues, (2) development of planning criteria, (3) inventory data and information collection, (4) management situation analysis, (5) formulation of alternatives, (6) estimation of the effects of the alternatives, (7) selection of the preferred alternative, (8) selection of the plan amendment, and (9) monitoring and evaluation. The steps of the planning and EIS process are shown in the flow chart below. At this early stage in the project, the range, or scope, of public and agency issues and concerns are being identified through comments received in response to this notice and during public scoping meetings to be held on June 20 and 21, 2001 (see next page).

The BLM needs public input on the planning criteria, resource concerns, and development of resource management alternatives to be used for the RMPA/EIS.

The study team is developing an inventory of resource information by gathering data representing human, natural, and cultural resources within the planning area. Integrating and using the issues identified, inventory of resource data, and existing management direction, the team will conduct an analysis to identify (1) areas for limited or restricted uses; (2) levels of resource production; (3) allowable resource uses; (4) resource condition objectives; (5) program constraints; and (6) general management direction.

A range of reasonable alternatives, including an alternative considering no action as required by NEPA, will be developed and analyzed in the EIS. Two potential alternatives include one with emphasis on increased public access and resource use, and another would have an emphasis toward resource protection. Through scoping, the public will assist in developing the alternatives to be addressed in the planning and EIS process.

The potential impacts of the alternatives will be assessed and the results of the analyses will be documented in a draft RMPA/EIS, which will be available for public review. Comments on the document received from agencies and the public will be considered and incorporated into the proposed RMPA/final EIS. After a Governor’s Consistency Review and public protest period, BLM will issue a record of decision.

What are the preliminary planning criteria?

Preliminary planning criteria to guide the development of the RMPA/EIS include the following:

- resource management actions shall not impair, and shall be compatible and consistent with, military use in accordance with the Withdrawal Act (PL 106-65); comply with laws, executive orders, and regulations: and be consistent with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield
- clarify BLM and Ft. Bliss management responsibilities
- develop reasonable and achievable resource outputs within available technology and budget constraints

- provide for public access to and across McGregor Range where compatible
- provide for mineral development where compatible
- identify water use needs and any impacts on existing water resources
- identify the sub-basins for McGregor Range and use as the organizational framework for water resources evaluation
- maintain or improve vegetation conditions
- identify any infestations of noxious/invasive weeds and provide for management alternatives to address existing and potential problems
- provide for the harvesting of vegetation products if compatible
- provide for the protection and management of the sensitive, state-listed, and Federally listed plant and animal species
- provide for livestock grazing where compatible
- provide for the protection and management of wildlife habitat
- identify any impacts of predator management
- provide for hunting in concert with biological cycles when possible
- provide for recreational uses where compatible
- identify any impacts of off-highway vehicle use
- maintain or enhance visual quality
- provide for the management of cultural and paleontological resources
- continue to provide for the management of the Culp Canyon Wilderness Study Area under Interim Management Policy procedures pending Congressional determination

What are the preliminary resource concerns?

- lands and access
- wilderness study area
- air quality
- cultural and paleontological resources
- vegetation
- wildlife
- special status species
- soils
- water resources
- social and economic conditions
- visual resources
- fire management
- livestock grazing
- recreation
- minerals
- unexploded ordnance/hazardous materials

What are the decisions that will result from the RMPA/EIS?

The anticipated decisions include the following:

- Which areas are available for limited/restricted public use?
- What are desired levels of resource production or the conditions of those resources and what are the allowable resource use levels?
- What should be the magnitude and intensity of BLM’s resource management on McGregor Range?
- What constraints should be placed on natural resource uses on McGregor Range?

- What level of public use is allowable within the constraints of the military’s mission on McGregor Range?
- What is the general natural resource management direction for McGregor Range?

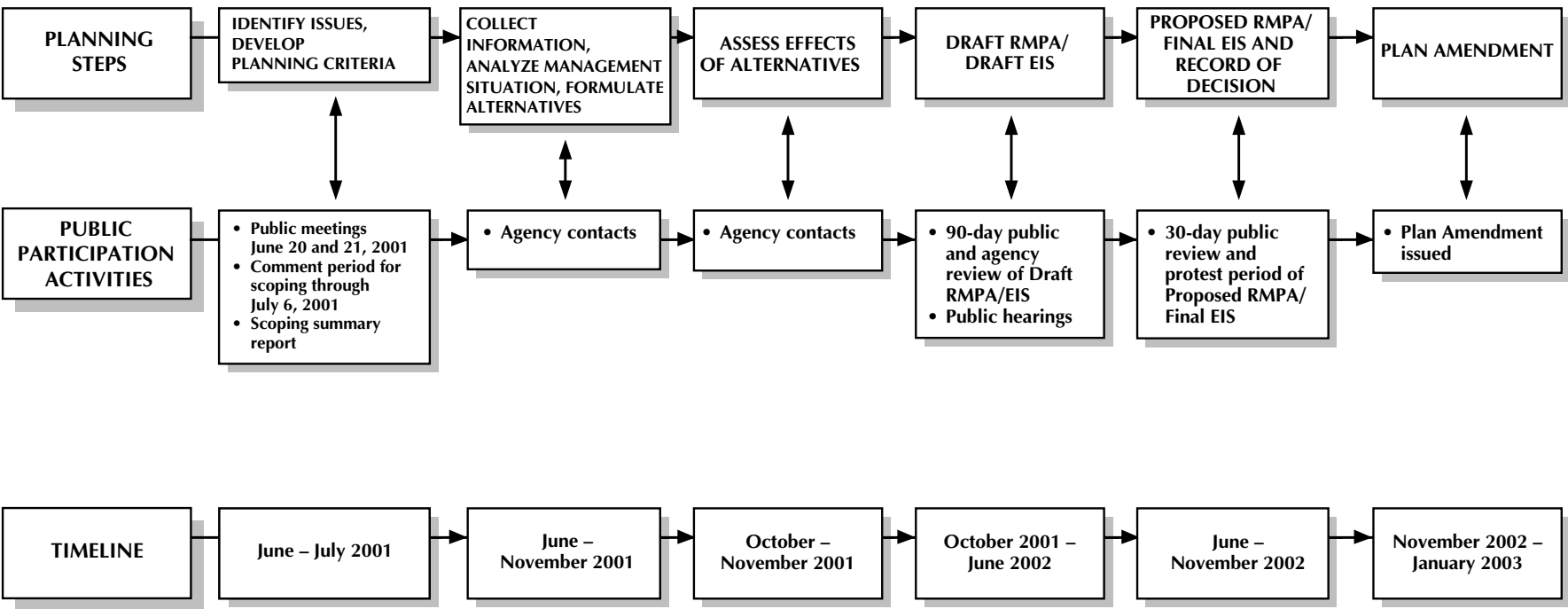
How can the public participate in the project?

There will be opportunities for the public to be informed and to participate in the process. The first opportunity is the upcoming public scoping meetings. These meetings will begin with a brief presentation to provide an overview of the planning and EIS process. Details for the meetings are provided below and also will be announced through media releases. Your comments are important to us, particularly at this early stage of the process. Please attend!

The preaddressed and postage-paid comment form accompanying this scoping packet can be used to submit written comments at any time during the scoping period, which ends on July 6, 2001.

Once the draft RMPA/EIS is completed, the document will be released to the public to review for a period of 90 days. During that 90-day period, the BLM will conduct public hearings to accept comments on the draft document. Written comments will be accepted during this period.

The BLM will maintain a mailing list throughout the process. Informational materials will be distributed during the process to those on the mailing list. In addition, anyone interested in more information or being added to the mailing list should contact BLM’s Team Leader Tom Phillips at (505) 525-4377.



## PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

### Please Attend!

**Wednesday, June 20, 2001, 6:30-8:30pm**  
Otero County Courthouse  
Commission Chambers Room 253,  
1000 New York Avenue  
Alamogordo, NM

**Thursday, June 21, 2001, 6:30-8:30pm**  
BLM – Las Cruces Field Office  
1800 Marquess  
Las Cruces, NM